

Sutton Planning Commission Regular Meeting
March 22, 2021 @ 6:00 pm via Zoom

Attendees: Byron Savoy—Chair, Hank Parker—Vice Chair, Darlene Ahrens—Chair Energy Committee, Joe Witt—ZA, Paul Brouha—Clerk, Sutton Planning Commission, Robert Simms, Alison Low--NVDA

1. The meeting was called order at 6:11 pm.
2. Attendees introduced themselves--no additions/deletions to proposed agenda were made.

NVDA Senior Planner Alison Low conducted the NVDA Certification Hearing of the Sutton Energy Plan. She noted that NVDA staff had reviewed the document with a checklist and found that it complied with the requirements of Act 174. She asked for comments and Paul noted that the municipal utilities in the NVDA service area were unprepared for the planned large increase in use of electricity as transportation and space heating is electrified. He suggested they needed to conduct “flow studies” to determine what infrastructure upgrades would be needed and to then support rate cases to fund the upgrades before the Public Utility Commission. Alison suggested grants for such studies might be available through the Northern Border Regional Commission. The hearing closed at 6:20 pm.

3. Prior to consideration of approving draft minutes of past meetings, Hank Parker questioned who the voting members of the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board (DRB) were and specifically questioned whether Joe Witt, in his role as ZA, could be a member of both bodies. He asked about who qualified for determining a quorum. A quorum was declared and there was general agreement to research Joe’s status prior to the next meeting of either body. There was further agreement to defer consideration of DRB minutes until the next DRB hearing. Darlene moved approval of the draft February 25, 2020 minutes and Hank seconded the motion—motion passed unanimously. Hank moved approval of the August 25, 2020 minutes and Darlene seconded the motion—motion passed unanimously. Darlene moved approval of the draft December 21, 2020 minutes and Hank seconded the motion—motion passed unanimously.
4. Old business

Darlene began discussing Energy Plan implementation by noting she had changed all 2020 action plan dates to 2021. She noted that the first priority for the Energy Committee (EC) was to increase efficiency of the Town Office building beginning with actions recommended in the 2011 audit. She had learned that Efficiency Vermont was required to work with towns and needed a contact with "someone of authority." She will ask the Selectboard to appoint one of their members to be the contact in order to qualify for available rebates and incentives. The Selectboard will be asked to approve installation of LED lights which will pay for themselves in just 1 ½ years. Other efficiency upgrades include programmable thermostats, insulating/sealing around windows, and foam insulation of the basement—some of the items will need to be budgeted for. A recent Infra-red air infiltration study revealed the building "leaks like a sieve." The Selectboard will need facts so a new audit will eventually be needed to provide current cost estimates.

The EC is also trying to figure out what would be a good suite of "dashboard" metrics to assess progress in the future. Darlene asked if the group felt a survey at Town Meeting might be worthwhile and could help identify people who would like to have an energy audit. Byron suggested low-income weatherization is available through NETO, the Northeast Training Organization, but that the targeted folks don't all have internet and must be contacted in-person (he volunteered to help with such outreach). Paul noted a recap of the major recommendations of VECAN's "Lunch & Learn" had been prepared by Bekah Kuster and was available online. Darlene noted that the Heat Squad had received a rush of calls after their brochure was sent out with the tax bill in 2019 but that such communications needed to be repeated. Joe suggested using different strategies and a target of once/month be adopted year-long. Suggested strategies included tabling at Saturday morning recycling and at the White Market, area-wide brochures (like the Heat Squad's), bulletin board postings, newspaper articles with lists of upcoming events, Front Porch Forum items—but target once/month. Darlene said she had a possible coordinator for the Window Dressers program and invited help from all members—grants are available for the NEK from Vermont Community Foundation but must be applied for (could be used to support energy audits as is being done in Ryegate & Peacham).

5. New business

Joe will complete drafting application forms and supporting information for DRB and Planning Commission permits and will provide review drafts to the Clerk in advance of the next regular PC meeting April 26, 2021.

Joe also discussed current issues with zoning administration/bylaws enforcement and noted his letters and visits have resulted in very little action. He stated the Selectboard must be willing to support enforcement. He noted that the threat of fines had gotten action right away but that the situation is difficult and many towns are facing similar problems. Hank moved PC amend bylaws to include a penalty section and Darlene seconded the motion but noted the Selectboard must first agree to enforce the bylaws and that a discussion with them should be the first action. Hank withdrew his motion and Darlene withdrew her second. Joe moved he go before the Selectboard at their April meeting and explain his dilemma. Darlene seconded the motion. Byron called the question—vote was Darlene, Joe, Paul, Hank in favor and Byron opposed. Motion passed.

At Joe's request, Paul agreed to update PC/DRB contact list.

In response to Paul's question, Joe noted there was no poster announcing the April 5, 2021 DRB hearing up at the Engelmann property. Paul will make one up and bring it to Joe to post.

6. The meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.

Submitted,

Paul Brouha, Clerk